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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of maternal employment on perceptions of the specific costs and benefits to children associated with mothers' working outside the home and professional ambition among young adults. A sample of 90 college students completed a survey including the Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children (BACMEC). Results revealed that a history of maternal non-employment was associated with students' perceiving maternal employment as entailing greater costs to children. No group differences in perceived benefits associated with maternal employment were observed. Students whose mothers worked part-time during their infancy were least likely to support the notion that maternal employment increases children's risk of developing psychological problems or low self esteem. Analyses also revealed that students whose mothers did not work at all during their elementary school years perceived there as being greater risks associated with maternal employment, while those whose mothers were employed full-time during their elementary school years perceived the greatest advantages associated with maternal employment. Young adults whose mothers worked during their adolescence were more likely to believe that maternal employment increases sons' respect for women and that children whose mothers work are more likely to understand and appreciate the value of a dollar. Participants whose mothers worked part-time during their adolescence were more likely to feel that warm and secure relationships with mother are jeopardized by a mother's working, while children of full-time working mothers were least likely to believe this. (Contains 101 references.) (Author)

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Young Adults' Perceptions of the Specific Costs and Benefits Associated with Maternal Employment

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of maternal employment on perceptions of the specific costs and benefits to children associated with mothers' working outside the home and professional ambition among young adults. A sample of 90 college students completed a survey including the Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children (BACMEC). Oneway ANOVA (maternal employment during the participants' infancy: non-employment, part time employment, and fulltime employment) revealed that a history of maternal non-employment was associated with students' perceiving maternal employment as entailing greater costs to children. No group differences in perceived benefits associated with maternal employment were observed. Students whose mothers worked part-time during their infancy were least likely of the three groups to support the notion that maternal employment increases children's risk of developing psychological problems or low self esteem.
Oneway ANOVA examining maternal employment groups defined by experience during each of the three remaining developmental periods (preschool, elementary school, and adolescent years) revealed several significant group differences. Students whose mothers did not work at all during their elementary school years perceived there as being greater risks associated with maternal employment than the students whose mothers were in the other two maternal employment

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categories, while those whose mothers were employed fulltime during their elementary school years perceived the greatest advantages associated with maternal employment. Young adults whose mothers worked (full-time or part-time) during their adolescence were more likely to believe that maternal employment increases sons' respect for women and that children whose mothers work are more likely to understand and appreciate the value of a dollar. Participants whose mothers worked part-time during their adolescence were more likely to feel that warm and secure relationships with mother are jeopardized by a mother's working, while children of full-time working mothers were least likely to believe this.

Introduction

According to recent United States Census Bureau figures, 59 percent of women with children under one year of age participate in the labor force (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). This level of maternal employment is almost double that characterizing the US in 1976 (when 31 percent of mothers described themselves as employed). By 1978, the United States Department of Labor reported that one-half of the mothers had joined the work force (United States of Labor, 1979). Less than two years later, the number of working mothers had surpassed the fifty percent mark (USDI, 1980).

Although families with employed mothers now represent the majority, attitudes about maternal employment are far from consensual in this country. Politicians, parenting experts, researchers, and social commentators continue to hotly debate the merits of mothers' working outside the home. The impact of maternal employment has been studied empirically from many different perspectives. Some reviews suggest that maternal employment is oftentimes positive for the development of girls and sometimes negative for boys (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1982; Hoffman, 1980). Bronfenbrenner and his associates have shown that working mothers have a more optimistic view of their daughters than their sons, while the opposite is true for homemakers (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1984). These findings are associated with the increase in mother-son conflict and strengthen peer involvement by boys. Both of these facts may put some males at jeopardy for an assortment of peer-related problems.

Wright and Young (1998) found that children from households where the mother works had more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles. Another finding of this study was the fact that males appear more affected by the working status of their mothers than by family structure, and females are affected both by family structure and maternal employment status.

Jackson and Tein (1998) found that older adolescent boys, compared to older girls and younger boys, agreed most with career having a negative effect on men and women in family and relationship roles. However, young adolescents who planned to be employed and whose mothers were employed outside the home disagreed with the negative effect of career. Girls generally agreed with the gender role equality concept, and older boys had greater disagreement with adult gender equality compared to older girls and younger boys. The gender and age effects may show that as boys get closer to the age of independence, and begin visualizing themselves in the role of an adult, their conceptions of gender roles become more traditional. Girls held more egalitarian gender attitudes, regardless of age. Findings in this study indicate that when a mother works outside the home and therefore holds a dual commitment, the adolescent's perceptions of adulthood and beliefs of priorities and responsibilities in family roles is affected. The similarities in responses from girls and younger adolescent boys was most evident among those with immediate plans for work or marriage and those with employed mothers. Although this

indicates a transition for boys from egalitarian views to more traditional views, it is not known at what age this transition takes place, or whether the point in which the mother started working outside the home has a relationship to the attitudes found.

Vander Ven et. al. (2001) studied the impact of maternal employment on adolescent delinquency and the impact of children's being left home alone due to maternal employment. The direct effect of maternal employment was studied, as well as the effect of maternal employment on known delinquency risk factors, or "pathways to delinquency". The analysis suggested that maternal employment had no direct effect on delinquency, but did have an indirect impact on the delinquency pathways. There was a small effect of maternal employment on supervision of children; maternal employment was related to lower supervision, and thereby higher risk of delinquency. There was little influence of maternal employment on any of the other known pathways to delinquency. This held true regardless of the age of the child when the mother was working. Neighborhood disorder was shown to be related to delinquent peer association, while maternal employment was not.

Montemayor (1984) explored the relationship between maternal employment and adolescents' relations with parents, siblings, and peers. Researchers have focused on prepubescent-aged children because it is believed that younger children may be at jeopardy for a host of psychological and social problems due to the separation from their mother (Bowlby, 1973). A recent review which focused particularly on adolescent development as a function of maternal employment showed differences in parent and peer involvement, level of academic success, sex role orientation, rate of delinquency, and degree of psychological modification (Montemayor and Clayton, 1983). It has been suggested that the connection between maternal employment and parent and peer relations during adolescence is inconsistent, but generally some adolescents have disagreeable relations with employed mothers, especially when the mother is working full-time. However, it has been reported that adolescents with working mothers were more involved in running the household and that they actually had a better relationship with their parents, when compared with adolescents with nonworking mothers. In other studies adolescents reported more disagreements with their mothers and less involvement in school clubs and activities (Cogle et al., 1982; Douvan and Adelson, 1966; Gold and Andres, 1978; Propper, 1972). These findings are somewhat at odds with conservative wisdom about the significance of mothers to adolescents and the effects of maternal employment on adolescent growth.

Males, but not females, had more arguments, which were of longer duration and greater intensity, with their mothers and siblings when their mothers worked than when they were homemakers. No connection was found between martial employment status and the number of males who had conflicts with their fathers or the number of females who reported conflicts with their mothers or fathers (Montemayor, 1984). For both males and females arguments with siblings were longer when mothers worked than when they were homemakers. Adolescents of both sexes spent less free time with their parents when their mothers worked, especially when they worked full-time, than when they were not employed. Males spent the most time alone when their mothers worked full time. The results of this study show that maternal employment status is linked to adolescents' associations with mothers, fathers, siblings, and peers. The data in this study suggested that adolescents perceive more conflict with mothers than mothers perceive with them. Working mothers expect more help around the house than nonworking mothers, which could cause accelerated conflict in the family. These findings imply that parent-adolescent relations in a family with a working mother are more focused on accomplishing home tasks at the cost of family recreation and play. When the mother is working the adolescent

spends more time away from home with peers, which lessens the rate of interaction with the father.

Gardner and LaBrecque (1986) explored the effects of maternal employment in relation to the sex role orientation of adolescents. In the 1970's, researchers concentrated on the effects of maternal employment on various adolescent attitudes towards future life goals, career and educational ambitions, and sex role ideology (Bird, 1979). Tomeh (1979) determined that adolescent sons' attitudes toward female employment were favorable if their own mother worked. This study also found young women had a favorable non-traditional attitude towards women in the work force if their own mother worked.

Etaugh (1974) found no correlation between female juvenile delinquency and maternal employment. Nelson (1974) found that the majority of adolescent females with non-working mothers had a better adjustment score than those who had working mothers. In addition, the adolescent sons of full-time employed mothers were found to become better socially adjusted than those who had non-working mothers. Also, Hoffman (1974) found that there was a related difference in IQ scores for both female and males in upper-middle class families, relating to maternal employment. The author conveyed an association between nontraditional femininity and greater IQs in girls and the opposite was found for boys. In the "skilled labor" group of employed mothers, the sons had higher school grades than the boys whose mothers were homemakers (Etaugh, 1974; Hoffman, 1974).

A longitudinal study administered to 110 women attending a four-year coeducational college found that the mothers of career-oriented women had more education and their fathers had higher status positions than the women who were not career-oriented. They also found a correlation between salient women and maternal employment. Students who had working mothers spoke spontaneously and favorably about their mother's employment during the interviews, and were in favor of combining career and marriage (Almquist and Agrist, 1971). Also, mother's occupation and experience alter her son's sex role attitudes (Tomeh, 1979). However, daughters intended to have the most open sex role orientation regardless of the maternal employment status and history. The sons' sex role orientation of employed mothers was influenced more in every category compared to the sons of non-employed mothers.

Haber (1980) discovered that parental encouragement was a leading factor in determining a daughter's career choice. Also, marital employment was not a major factor in determining a daughter's career choice, but it was suggested that the working mothers passed on greater choices and attitudes to their daughters. Likewise, Brogan and Kutner (1976) found that female undergraduates were more nontraditional in their sex role orientation if their mothers were in the work force than whose mothers were not. The difference was not statistically significant. It was reported that the higher the educational level of the mothers, the more nontraditional attitudes were passed on to the daughter.

Gardner and Labrecque (1976) researched the effects of maternal employment and sex role orientation on male and female high school students using maternal employment status as an independent variable, and found that adolescent attitudes towards sex roles are influenced by maternal employment. For instance, daughters who have mothers employed outside the home have a more liberal attitude toward the sex role orientation than sons whose mothers are employed. In addition, daughters who have working mothers are also more liberal than those daughters of homemakers. However, females may be influenced by factors other than maternal

employment on the views of sex roles, such as role models. Also, sons of employed mothers have a more liberal attitude towards sex role orientation than sons of unemployed mothers.

In addition to attitudes, adolescent views are influenced by maternal employment in the division of the household tasks. For example, males and females both indicated that household tasks should be shared when both husband and wife work outside the home. However, when the wife is a homemaker it should be mainly her responsibility. In conclusion, it is evident that more daughters will be entering the workforce in the years to come, and sons will be married to employed wives. All in all, it is evident that society needs to be more liberal with attitudes toward marital employment for the welfare of families.

Investigations of infancy have revealed that the relationship between one parent and a child could affect the relationship between the other parent and the child, which is known as the "second-order effect" (Belsky, 1981). The results of one study reported that husbands with working wives did not spend considerably more time engaged in providing child care in contrast to those with nonworking wives (Pleck, 1983; Walker and Woods, 1976), while they did spend somewhat more play time with their children.

Employment is a leading factor broadening the physical, emotional and financial well-being of women. Working women are healthier, show more self esteem, freedom from emotional problems, greater longevity, and their daughters have higher achievement patterns (Belle, 1982; Guttentag, N., Salasin, S; & Belle, D., 1980; Hofferth & Moore, 1979; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Kanter, 1977).

The current investigation assessed the relationship between maternal employment (full-time, part-time, and nonemployment) during four developmental periods (infancy, preschool years, elementary school years, and adolescence) and young adults' perceptions of the specific costs and benefits associated with a mother's working outside the home.

Method

Subjects:

The subjects used in this study were 107 undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology class at a small liberal arts college in the Middle Atlantic region of the U.S. The sample consisted of 48 males and 59 females. The subjects ranged in age from 17 to 24 years old.

Procedure:

The packet used in this study was handed out to subjects in the introductory psychology classroom. Subjects were asked to fill out the packet in its entirety. Ample time was given to the students to complete the questionnaire packet. The packet used in this study consisted of five different parts.

In part one, subjects were asked to provide demographic information and to answer questions concerning their career and family expectations. These questions required subjects to disclose information concerning their expectations about family plans, job type, job characteristics, and work preference based on the age of their youngest child. Subjects were also asked 10 questions concerning their attitudes toward their mother and father. These questions required subjects to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on a 4 point Likert scale.

Part two of the packet was made up of the BACMEC questionnaire (Greenberger et al., 1988). The BACMEC is a 24-item scale developed to measure Beliefs About the

Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children. The BACMEC included beliefs about both benefits (13 items) and costs (11 items). Studies of five samples (n=375) have demonstrated that the total BACMEC scale and its subscales are highly reliable and have good convergent, divergent, and concurrent validity (Greenberger et al., 1988).

In part three of the packet, subjects were asked to disclose information about their mother's work status at each stage of development. The stages of development were infancy (birth to 1 1/2 years old), preschool (2 to 5 years old), childhood (6 to 12 years old), and adolescence (13 to 18 years old). The subjects were asked to report whether their mothers were employed part-time, fulltime, or not employed outside the home during each stage of development. Subjects also disclosed information about their mother's job, indicating whether it was professional, white collar, or blue collar work. Subjects were also asked to indicate whether or not they had been raised in a single parent household.

Results

Directionally adjusted responses to the BACMEC were totaled for each participant to create two summary measures of attitudes toward maternal employment, one assessing perceived benefits and another assessing perceived costs. Students who reported a history of having lived in a single parent household were excluded from subsequent analyses.

A Oneway ANOVA (maternal employment during infancy) was performed in order to evaluate the relationship between maternal employment status during infancy (non-employment, part time employment, and fulltime employment) and students' perceptions of maternal employment costs and benefits to children. Significant differences on the Cost subscale were found among the maternal employment groups ($F=3.35$; $df=2/79$; $p<.05$). Students whose mothers did not work at all perceived there as being greater costs associated with maternal employment than the students in the other two maternal employment groups (non-employment: $x=35.79$, $s.d.=10.35$, $n=33$, part time employment $x=28.86$,$s.d.=9.84$,$n=21$, and fulltime employment $x=33.71$, $s.d.=8.61$, $n=28$). Oneway ANOVA did not reveal significant differences among the groups in terms of the perceived benefits of maternal employment.

Separate Oneway ANOVA performed on the individual items of the Cost subscale revealed three significant group differences. On each of three items, participants' with part-time employed mothers perceived the fewest disadvantage associated with maternal employment.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups ($F=3.84$; $df=2/80$; $p< .05$).
BACMEC Item: Working mothers are more likely to have children with psychological problems than mothers who do not work outside the home.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	2.67	1.27	33
Part-time	2.00	.98	22
Full-time	2.82	.94	28

Students whose mothers worked part-time during their infancy were least likely of the three groups to support the notion that maternal employment increases children's risk of developing psychological problems. Interestingly, participants whose mothers were unemployed or worked full-time responded similarly to this item.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
($F=3.22$; $df=2/80$; $p< .05$)
BACMEC Item: Children of mothers who work develop lower self esteem because they think they are not worth devoting attention to.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	2.85	1.34	33
Part-time	2.18	.96	22
Full-time	2.96	1.04	28

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
($F=4.55$; $df=2/80$; $p< .01$)
BACMEC Item: Children of working mothers are more likely to experiment with drugs, alcohol and sex at an earlier age.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	3.30	1.42	33
Part-time	2.23	1.15	22
Full-time	2.93	1.24	28

Young adults whose mothers worked part-time were least likely of the three groups to perceive children of working mothers as more likely to experiment with substance use and sex. Those whose mothers were not employed were most likely to perceive this adverse effect of maternal employment, while those whose mothers worked full-time during their infancy endorsed this belief at moderate levels.

Oneway ANOVA were performed in order to evaluate the relationship between maternal employment status during the participants' preschool years (non-employment, part time employment, and fulltime employment) and students' perceptions of maternal employment costs and benefits to children. No significant differences were found on the groups' scores on the summary measures of perceived benefits and costs associated with maternal employment. Individual BACMEC item scores also failed to differentiate among the three maternal employment groups.

Oneway ANOVA were next performed in order to evaluate the relationship between maternal employment status during the participants' elementary school years (non-employment, part time employment, and fulltime employment) and students' perceptions of maternal employment costs and benefits to children. No significant differences on either the Cost or Benefit summary subscales were obtained. However, oneway ANOVA revealed significant group differences on one individual item on the cost subscale. On this item, students whose

mothers did not work at all during their elementary school years perceived there as being greater risks associated with maternal employment than the students whose mothers were in the other two maternal employment categories (non-employment: x=3.19, s.d.=1.10, n=26, part time employment x=2.53,s.d.=1.30,n=15, and fulltime employment x=2.38, s.d.=1.23, n=42; F=3.76, df=2/80, p<.0287). Separate Oneway ANOVA performed on the individual items of the Benefit subscale revealed three significant group differences. On each of three items, participants' whose mothers were employed fulltime during their elementary school years perceived the greatest advantages associated with maternal employment. Those whose mothers worked parttime rated the advantages of maternal employment at an intermediate level, and those whose mothers did not work at all outside the home while they were in elementary school provided the lowest ratings of advantages.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
(F= 3.76; df= 2/8; p< .05)
BACMEC Cost Subscale Item: Children of working mothers grow up to be less competent parents than other children, because they have not had adequate parental role models.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	3.19	1.10	26
Part-time	2.53	1.30	15
Full-time	2.38	1.23	42

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
(F= 3.14; df=2/80 ; p< .05).
BACMEC Benefit Subscale Item: For young children, working mothers are good role models for leading busy and productive lives.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	3.73	1.08	26
Part-time	3.93	.46	15
Full-time	4.36	1.14	42

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
(F= 3.65; df= 2/80; p< .05)
BACMEC Benefit Subscale Item: Daughters of working mothers are better prepared to combine work and motherhood, if they choose to do both.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	3.85	.88	26
Part-time	4.33	.72	15
Full-time	4.48	1.04	42

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during infancy groups
(F= 5.17; df= 2/80; p< .01)
BACMEC Benefit Subscale Item: Children whose mothers work are more likely to understand and appreciate the value of a dollar

	Mean	s.d.	N
Non-employment	3.12	.99	26
Part-time	3.53	1.06	15
Full-time	3.98	1.14	42

Oneway ANOVA comparing the maternal employment groups' (non-employment, part-time, versus full-time during the participants' adolescence) scores on the summary measure assessing the perceived benefits associated with maternal employment indicated a trend ($p=.09$) that did not reach statistical significance. Young adults whose mothers worked part-time were somewhat more likely to report there as being higher benefits associated with maternal employment. Participants whose mothers did not work during their adolescence were the least likely to perceive maternal employment as beneficial. Those whose mothers worked full-time had scores which fell in between those of the other two groups. No significant differences on the summary measure of perceived costs emerged.

Scores on individual BACMEC items were then used to compare the three groups defined by their experience with maternal employment during adolescence. Oneway ANOVA revealed significant differences on two of the Benefit Scale items and one of the items from the Cost Scale.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during adolescence groups ($F= 3.57$; $df= 2/80$; $p< .05$)
BACMEC Item: Boys whose mothers work are more likely to develop respect for women.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Unemployed	3.68	0.69	25
Part-time	4.40	0.74	15
Full-time	4.21	1.10	43

Oneway ANOVA indicated that young adults whose mothers worked part-time during their adolescence viewed mothers' working more beneficial in part because they thought boys whose mothers work are more likely to develop respect for women. Participants whose mothers worked full-time shared this belief, although less consistently. In contrast, young adults whose mothers were unemployed during their adolescence thought that boys whose mothers worked were not more likely to develop respect for women.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during adolescence groups ($F= 3.27$; $df= 2/80$; $p< .05$)
BACMEC item: Children whose mothers work are more likely to understand and appreciate the value of a dollar.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Unemployed	3.16	0.90	25
Part-time	3.73	0.96	15
Full-time	3.86	1.25	43

Young adults whose mothers worked full-time or part-time during their adolescence were more likely to believe that children whose mothers work are more likely to understand and

appreciate the value of a dollar. Those participants whose mothers were unemployed during their adolescence did not feel that the child of a working mother is more likely to understand and appreciate the value of a dollar.

Oneway ANOVA comparisons of three maternal employment during adolescence groups ($F = 4.14$; $df = 2/80$; $p < .05$)
BACMEC Item: Children are less likely to form a warm and secure relationship with a mother who is working full time.

	Mean	s.d.	N
Unemployed	3.76	1.09	25
Part-time	4.13	1.19	15
Full-time	3.19	1.26	43

Oneway ANOVA revealed that participants whose mothers worked part-time during their adolescence were more likely to feel that warm and secure relationships with mother are jeopardized by a mother's working. The study also found that the children of full-time working mothers were least likely to feel that warm and secure relationships are placed at risk by the mother's employment.

Discussion

The findings strongly suggest that young adults whose mothers did not work outside the home are more likely to perceive maternal employment as being unfavorable for children than those whose mothers did work outside the home, regardless of developmental period examined. Children of mothers who worked either fulltime or part-time were much less likely to perceive there as being substantial costs associated with maternal employment. This conclusion was evident regardless of the developmental period (infancy, preschool years, or elementary school years) during which mothers worked outside the home. This may suggest that children tend to most value whatever experiences their own families provided them. Loyalty to parental choice may account for why the offspring of mothers who opted to remain at home with their children perceive greater costs as being associated with any alternative to this lifestyle. Similarly, children whose own mothers worked (fulltime or part-time) may have rated the costs as being less seriously as a result of their needing to defend their parents' choices.

Another possibility is that the students whose mothers did not work, lacking personal experience with maternal employment, are more likely to echo popular alarmist myths about the risks associated with maternal employment. Without personal evidence to the contrary, they endorse beliefs common among many adults about the price children pay for their mothers' decisions to work. Consistent with this reasoning, the children of employed mothers may have adjusted their attitudes in light of their own failure to encounter obstacles as a result of their mothers' working.

A final possibility is that the children whose mothers stayed at home have a keener understanding of the costs associated with maternal employment because they are more aware of what they might have sacrificed had their mothers' choice been different. According to this line of reasoning, children of nonemployed mothers are in a privileged position for evaluating the costs associated with maternal employment.

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